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## Lawmakers: No drilling off Shore

### N.J. pols pan controversial energy bill

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BELMAR — Drilling for oil and natural gas off the New Jersey coast, which has been banned for the past 24 years, could become a reality under the energy bill now under consideration in the U.S. Senate, federal lawmakers warned Monday.

That would be disastrous for New Jersey's environment and economy, said Rep. Frank J. Pallone Jr., D-N.J.

"It would just devastate the tourism industry," Pallone said at a news conference on the boardwalk. "This makes absolutely no sense."

The legislation would allow the Department of the Interior to inventory all possible oil and natural gas resources off the nation's coastlines.

But conducting an inventory could lead to fish kills, oil spills or general disruption of the ocean's ecological balance, said U.S. Sen. Jon S. Corzine, D-N.J.

And once the inventory is performed, he added, it's not too far a leap for the government to take the next step and allow drilling for profit.

"I call it the slippery slope," Corzine said.

Spokespeople for the Department of the Interior would not comment.

Pallone and Corzine were joined by Belmar Mayor Kenneth Pringle and several environmentalists concerned about a possible end to the offshore-drilling moratorium first instituted in 1982 and later extended by both Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

Clinton used an executive order to stretch the moratorium to 2012, but such an order can be rescinded by another president. Also, the order would not prevent the proposed inventory, Pallone said.

Environmental advocates said the country wouldn't need to plumb the ocean depths for more natural resources if President Bush encouraged more energy-saving measures, such as requiring vehicles to get better mileage.

"This administration isn't interested in conservation," said Leann Foster-Sitar, policy director for the Sandy Hook-based American Littoral Society. "We say, 'Hands off our coast.' The moratorium must remain intact."

Pallone contended the government already knows there is a comparatively small amount of fossil fuel off the Atlantic coast, making the inventory redundant.

There are about 30 times as much oil and gas in areas already approved for drilling — such as the Gulf



(STAFF PHOTOS: DARYL STONE)

U.S. Sen. Jon S. Corzine, D-N.J., at the Taylor Pavilion in Belmar, speaks about the energy bill now under consideration in the Senate. The measure calls for drilling for oil and natural gas off the New Jersey coast.

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of Mexico — than might possibly be recovered off the Eastern seaboard, Pallone said.

Corzine added that the most important natural resources at the Jersey Shore are the sun, sand and water: Tourism in the Garden State generates more than \$5.5 billion a year in tax revenues and supplies more than 836,000 jobs.

"This is a tremendous asset for our community," Corzine said.

Corzine said he'll be working with other senators — including Republican Mel Martinez of Florida — to remove the inventory language from the Senate bill, which is expected to be debated over the next couple of weeks.

It won't be easy, he said.

"We have a fight on our hands," Corzine said.

The House of Representatives already passed its version of the energy legislation, according to Pallone. The bill does not provide for an inventory but would allow states to opt out of the moratorium in exchange for royalties from whatever resources are recovered, Pallone said.

If the Senate approves the bill with the inventory provision, it will be sent to a conference committee to be reconciled with the House legislation. The final version would likely allow an inventory, Corzine said.

Separately, Corzine, Pallone and Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg, D-N.J., are seeking passage of the COAST (Clean Ocean And Safe Tourism) Anti-Drilling Act, which would ban offshore drilling from Maine to Virginia.

Corzine, who is running for governor, also called on Republican opponent Doug Forrester to support a permanent moratorium.

Forrester spokeswoman Sherry Sylvester said he is "adamantly opposed to anything that would potentially harm tourism on the Jersey Shore."

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